

Company CALFEX

A Critical Fire Support Synchronization Exercise

by Captain Kevin M. Felix

Bravo Company Commander was waiting for the order to move. The mission of the task force was to conduct simultaneous company deliberate attacks to destroy enemy platoon strongpoints and restore the international border. His unit was the main effort for the task force and had priority of close air support (CAS), attack helicopters and the fires of Falcon's Fury, the brigade's direct support (DS) artillery battalion.

The word finally came: begin the prep of the objective. As the lead platoon stepped across the line of departure moving south on Axis Bill (see Figure 1), the whistling of artillery overhead ended in the sounds of massed destruction in the distance.

The company commander and his FSO had planned this operation in painstaking detail. They had considered rates of march from one phase line to the next and calculated the minimum safe distances (MSDs) of each indirect fire system—105-mm howitzer rounds and 81-mm and 60-mm mortar rounds. Their goal was to echelon all fire support systems, overlapping their effects from the highest to lowest caliber, as the company moved toward the enemy's trench line. Success was defined as never having to slow or stop the company's movement to maintain MSDs.

The company moved south with the 1st and 2d Platoons along Axis Bill. 3d Platoon, which had the support mission, moved southeast to link-up with the task force's armor platoon slice. Then, from the support position, the two platoons would provide direct fires into the trench line during the company's final assault.

The platoon leader of the lead platoon and his forward observer (FO) knew the plan in detail. The FO knew the time of flight of mortar rounds to the objective to ensure the company moved forward with continuously synchronized fires. The platoon's lead squad moved inside the 105-mm MSD just beyond Phase Line

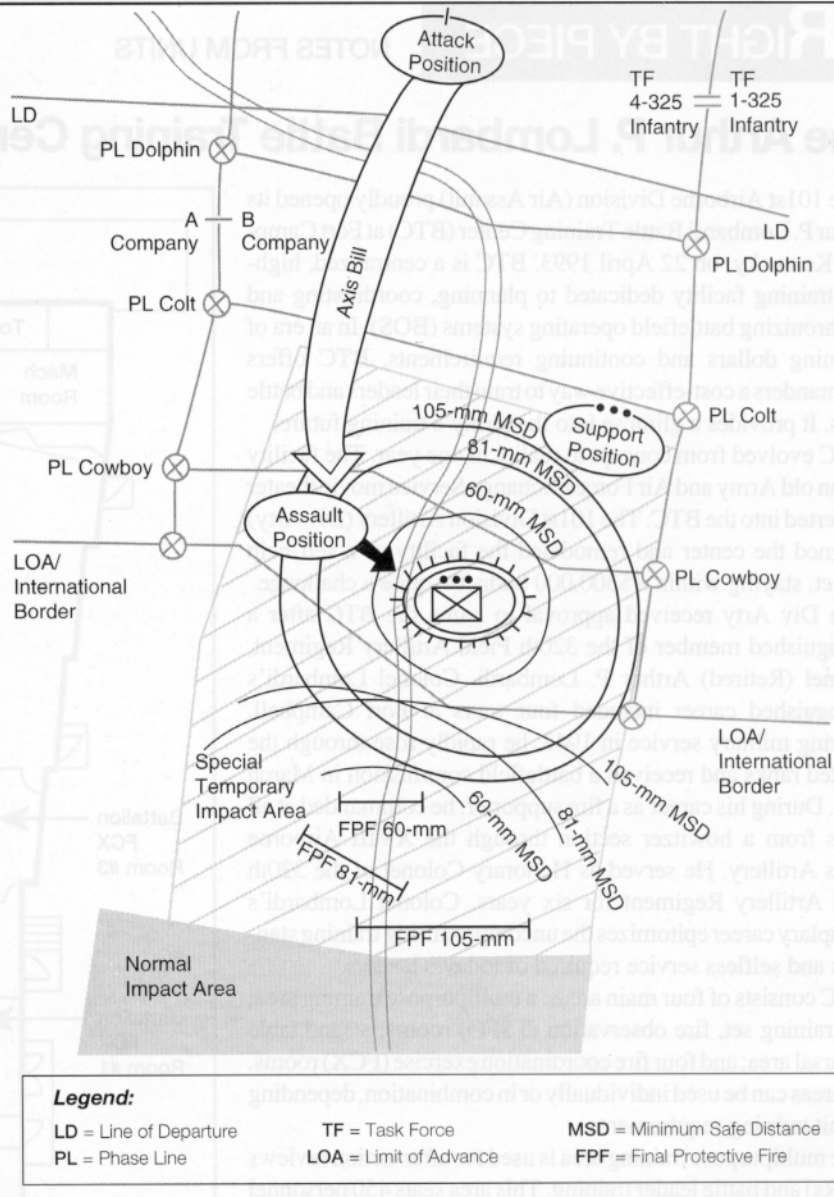


Figure 1: CALFEX Scenario. Bravo Company's mission is to conduct a deliberate attack along Axis Bill to destroy the enemy platoon strongpoint and restore the international border. Fire support is echeloned to allow overlapping fires from the highest to lowest caliber and synchronized with the company's movement to permit the continuous, safe maneuver of forces.

(PL) Colt. (The FO knew where the MSD started by pacing off the company's forward progress, called a pace count.) Suddenly, the echeloned fires of the 81-mm mortars crushed a bunker along the trench line. Simultaneously, the 105-mm fires shifted to blocking targets to seal off the enemy's egress routes.

The company never hesitated in its movement toward the objective. The task force commander's intent had been met—the company commander had synchronized fire support with his scheme of maneuver.

This scenario is an example of a combined arms live-fire exercise (CALFEX) conducted recently at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, by the 82d Airborne Division.

The CALFEX is essential for training maneuver leaders to synchronize fire support with their other battlefield operating systems (BOS).

Such an exercise is conducted in danger-close support of maneuvering forces. It emphasizes joint and combined arms operations and helps develop a far greater level of trust between fire support and maneuver than in other training exercises.

This article describes the planning, preparation and rehearsals necessary to synchronize maneuver and fire support in a first-class company CALFEX.

Planning Phase. As there are many training events that compete for time, land and ammunition during the fiscal

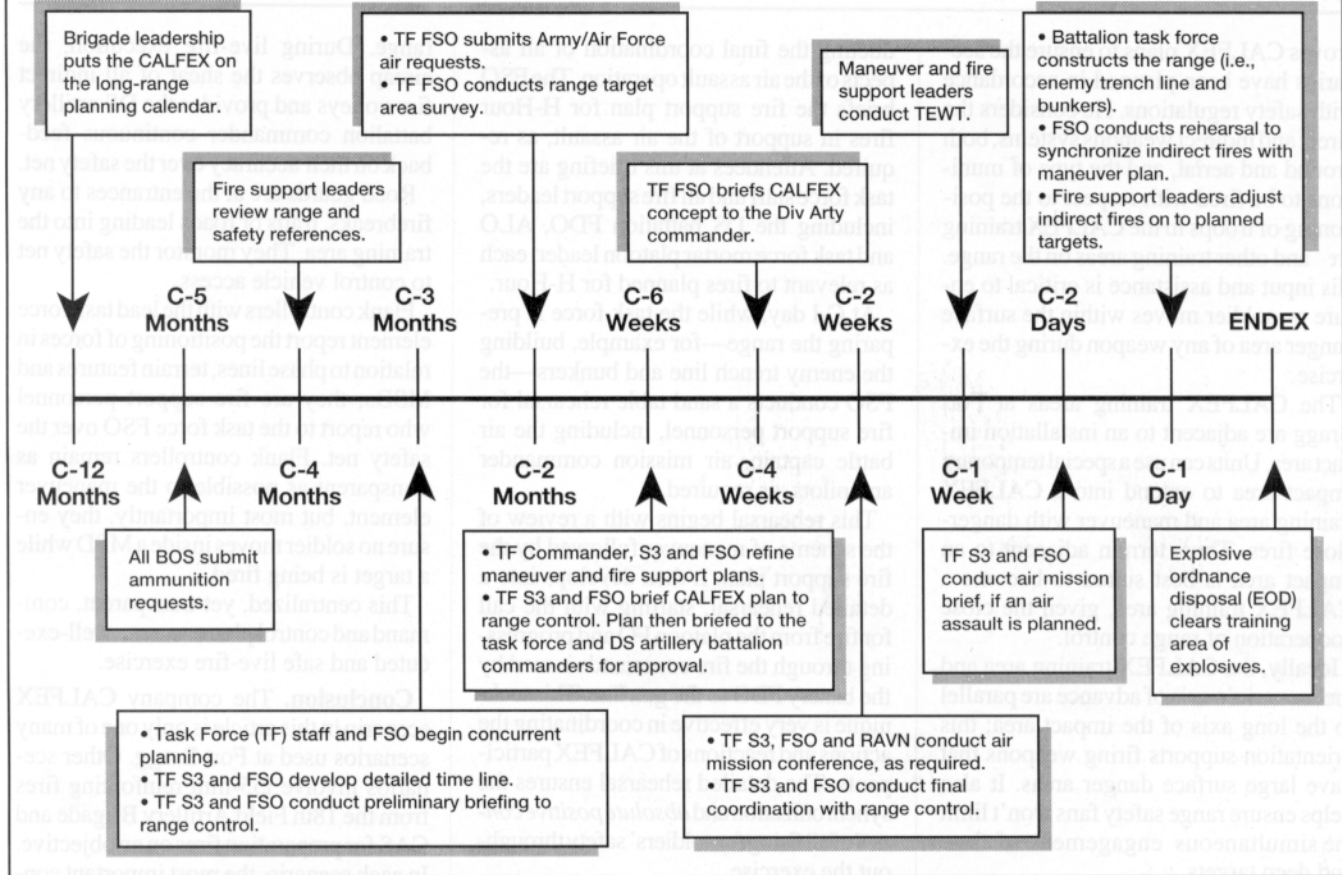


Figure 2: Company CALFEX Planning and Briefing Time Line.

year, leaders from the top down must establish the CALFEX as priority training and commit resources to it early. Planning begins at C-12 months when the brigade commander, maneuver battalion commanders and the DS battalion commander forecast the CALFEX on the brigade's long-range training calendar and determine the unit or units to train. Ideally, the training calendar will allow for squad live fires and platoon CALFEXs preceding the company CALFEX.

At C-5 months, maneuver brigade and DS battalion planning focus on ammunition forecasts and requests for support from the BOS, such as engineers, armor, aviation (both attack and lift), reinforcing artillery and CAS aircraft, as required. At C-4 months, fire support leaders reread pertinent post range regulations and local live-fire safety letters. For the CALFEX in the scenario, we used the 82d Division Artillery's (Div Arty's) memorandums that cover in detail everything from calculating MSDs and executing danger-close fires to developing and executing H-Hour fires in support of an air assault.

The battalion or task force FSO, the primary action officer for the CALFEX, and the task force staff begin concurrent

planning at C-3 months. Together, they develop a detailed time line for executing the exercise (see Figure 2).

The Task Force S3 and FSO brief the range control operations officer on the preliminary plan for the exercise. He assists in the initial planning by deconflicting other range activities. The FSO then requests the task force commander approve the time line as soon as possible to support timely requests for CAS through the brigade air liaison officer (ALO).

At C-2 months, the FSO must request CAS for specific blocks of time. Because CAS blocks are difficult to change once approved, a finalized time line ensures CAS is locked-in to support the exercise. Ideally, CAS will be available on alert at a local airfield to provide greater flexibility during the exercise.

Also at C-2 months, the FSO submits Army air requests through the regimental aviation liaison officer (RAVN) for both attack assets and an OH58 helicopter, the latter to act as the aircap. An aircap is an aerial platform that assists in safety command and control.

The FSO conducts a target area survey with the DS battalion survey team and uses a ground/vehicular laser locator des-

ignator (G/VLLD) or laser range finder to locate targets accurately for engagement during the CALFEX. This allows the FSO to compute and visualize MSD lines for concurrent planning with maneuver.

At C-6 weeks, the FSO and task force staff, with guidance from the commander, refine the fire support and maneuver plans. This synchronizes all assets in support of the mission. At the same time, the FSO updates the DS artillery battalion commander and his S3 on revisions to the fire support plan to ensure the changes are doctrinally correct and supportable.

Once the revised plans have been approved by the task force commander, his S3 and FSO brief the range control operations officer and key players, including a representative from each BOS. The key to making an impact on the youngest soldier in the unit is to adjust the fires in danger close—not 1,000 meters or even 600 meters from the forward line of troops but as close as peacetime safety restrictions allow (Army Regulation 385-63 Policies and Procedures for Firing Ammunition for Training, Target Practice and Combat). This briefing is the most critical part of the planning process.

The range control operations officer ap-

proves CALFEX plans to ensure the scenarios have been planned in accordance with safety regulations. He considers the direct and indirect weapons systems, both ground and aerial, and the type of munitions to be fired with respect to the positioning of troops in the CALFEX training area and other training areas on the range. His input and assistance is critical to ensure no soldier moves within the surface danger area of any weapon during the exercise.

The CALFEX training areas at Fort Bragg are adjacent to an installation impact area. Units can use a special temporary impact area to extend into a CALFEX training area and maneuver with danger-close fires. Thus, terrain adjacent to an impact area is best suited to become a CALFEX training area, given the close cooperation of range control.

Ideally, the CALFEX training area and the scenario's axis of advance are parallel to the long axis of the impact area; this orientation supports firing weapons that have large surface danger areas. It also helps ensure range safety fans won't limit the simultaneous engagement of close and deep targets.

Finalizing Phase. After the task force S3 and FSO have coordinated with range control, they brief the final plan to the task force commander and the DS artillery battalion commander for approval. At C-4 weeks, the task force FSO briefs the concept of the fire support plan to the Div Arty commander for his approval.

At C-2 weeks, if an air assault is planned, the task force staff, along with the FSO and brigade RAVN, conduct an air mission conference for the attack and lift aircraft company commanders. ALOs attend the conference to help deconflict the airspace over the training area.

At C-1 week, task force leaders, fire support, battery commanders and fire direction officers (FDOs) conduct a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) on the terrain. The task force commander, his FSO and the DS battalion commander lead the TEWT. The exercise provides leaders a detailed briefing on all phases of the operation on the actual terrain, to include the plan for synchronizing fire support. The objective is for leaders to understand clearly where the MSDs are for each weapon system in relation to phase lines and features on the ground.

At C-2 days, if an air assault is planned, the task force staff briefs the air mission commander and air battle captain, con-

ducting the final coordination of all aspects of the air assault operation. The FSO briefs the fire support plan for H-Hour fires in support of the air assault, as required. Attendees at this briefing are the task force staff and all fire support leaders, including the DS battalion FDO, ALO and task force mortar platoon leader, each as relevant to fires planned for H-Hour.

At C-1 day, while the task force is preparing the range—for example, building the enemy trench line and bunkers—the FSO conducts a sand table rehearsal for fire support personnel, including the air battle captain, air mission commander and pilots, as required.

This rehearsal begins with a review of the scheme of maneuver followed by the fire support plan. It then develops into a detailed rehearsal, starting with the call for fire from the platoon FO and progressing through the fire commands issued by the battery FDO to the gun line. This technique is very effective in coordinating the actions and reactions of CALFEX participants. The detailed rehearsal ensures the synchronization and *absolute positive control* of all firing for soldiers' safety throughout the exercise.

The DS battalion commander then reviews all live-fire safety procedures with the battery commanders and FDOs before adjusting rounds on targets. The remainder of the day is dedicated to battalion and battery rehearsals, to include applying firing data at the gun line.

Execution Phase. The CALFEX is conducted with a centralized command and control structure. Using parallel communications nets, an aircap, road guards and flank controllers ensures positive control of fires and safe operations.

Two important communications nets are used during the CALFEX: a fire net and a safety control net. Fire support assets engage targets passed over the fire net but only after the task force FSO has cleared each on the safety net. The FSO clears planned fires on the safety net well before their execution to avoid hindering an otherwise safe scenario. The DS battalion commander, who is the senior fire support controller, monitors the safety net.

An OH58-type helicopter manned by the brigade FSO is usually the CALFEX aircap. Before the exercise, the aircap helps adjust danger-close fires, especially on those targets that can't be observed from the ground. Just before live firing begins, the aircap sweeps the CALFEX training area, looking for personnel down

range. During live-fire execution, the aircap observes the sheaf of all indirect fire volleys and provides the DS artillery battalion commander continuous feedback on their accuracy over the safety net.

Road guards are at the entrances to any firebreaks, trails or roads leading into the training area. They monitor the safety net to control vehicle access.

Flank controllers with the lead task force element report the positioning of forces in relation to phase lines, terrain features and MSDs; they are fire support personnel who report to the task force FSO over the safety net. Flank controllers remain as transparent as possible to the maneuver element, but most importantly, they ensure no soldier moves inside a MSD while a target is being fired.

This centralized, yet transparent, command and control plan ensures a well-executed and safe live-fire exercise.

Conclusion. The company CALFEX scenario in this article is only one of many scenarios used at Fort Bragg. Other scenarios involve 155-mm reinforcing fires from the 18th Field Artillery Brigade and CAS for preparation fires on an objective. In each scenario, the most important consideration is integrating and synchronizing fire support assets to safely support the maneuver commander's intent.

These exercises are essential to train maneuver forces about fire support. They demand intense communications between maneuver commanders and their FSOs. The maneuver leader learns to rely on his fire supporter to advise him on the status of indirect fires and ensure his soldiers don't move inside an MSD. Thus, the maneuver leader learns the importance of echeloning fire support systems in executing his scheme of maneuver while his soldiers begin to see and feel the awesome destructive power of fire support.



Captain Kevin M. Felix, until recently, was the Battalion Fire Support Officer (FSO) for the 4th Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment in the 82d Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Currently, he's a student at the Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California. During Operation Desert Storm, he served as the Targeting Officer for the 2d Brigade and, later, Commander of C Battery, 2d Battalion, 319th Field Artillery, both in the 82d Airborne Division.